Half-baked Headlines Claim that Pot Stops HIV

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Research showed that an ingredient in pot alters the disease progression of HIV's simian cousin, SIV, in the guts of monkeys—findings that led to a rash of hyperbolic and highly inaccurate reporting in the popular press.

Louisiana State University scientists gave twice-daily injections of THC, the main psychoactive element of marijuana, to four rhesus macaque monkeys while giving a placebo to four others over the course of 17 months. Then they infected the monkeys with SIV.

Five months later, the gut tissue of the THC-treated monkeys had a higher level of CD8 memory T cells as well as a specific kind of CD4 cells that scientists believe are summoned to restore CD4s killed by the virus. There was also evidence of lowered inflammation in the gut.

The study's lead author, Patricia Molina, MD, PhD, a professor at the LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, says that the findings identify how THC may affect certain mechanisms in the body and in turn alter the course of SIV disease—a cautiously limited, but nonetheless intriguingly promising conclusion at this stage in the game.

In their colorful interpretation of the study, outlets such as ThinkProgress, The Huffington Post, Queerty, High Times and others outdid themselves by erroneously reporting that, as the Daily Beast put it, "Weed Could Block H.I.V.'s Spread. No, Seriously." The Guardian Liberty Voice was the most creatively off base, touting, "HIV Infections Cured With Cannabis a Real Possibility."

In an email to POZ, Molina expressed her "frustration with the liberal, inaccurate and wrong approach that the journalists have taken to interpreting our results."

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